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ABSTRACT

The seven articles in this journal issue examine the value of developing audience awareness in student writing. Among the topics and concerns expressed are the following: (1) the importance of purpose and audience in designing assignments, (2) the value of classmates regularly discussing each other's papers, (3) the writing development of one student through a semester, (4) how students' concept of audience changes when their attitudes toward revision change, (5) the characteristics of effective writing evaluations and strategies for making teacher commentary count, (6) the use of James Britton's audience classifications, and (7) the value of the teacher as audience. (HOD)

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THE LEAFLET

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Developing Audience Awareness

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Notes on this Issue:

The writers in this issue examine the value of developing audience awareness in student writing. Sandra Stotsky initially discusses the importance of purpose and audience in designing assignments. She then provides her readers with a method for helping elementary and junior high students develop writing plans for such assignments. Chris Anson makes a plea for more peer-group conferences. His own experiences demonstrate the value of classmates regularly discussing each other's papers. Sue Doe's article traces the writing development of one student through a semester. For T.C., her student, classmates became a motivation for change. When students' attitudes toward revision change, so do their concepts of audience, according to Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater. Pat Slattery uses Britton's audience classifications, discussing examples of student assignments for these progressively more difficult audiences. The final article by Tom Newkirk asks teachers to reconsider the value of the teacher-as-audience. As we design assignments to be written to many different audiences, Newkirk's article reminds us not to forget ourselves as audience. Although some of these articles discuss approaches used with college freshmen, I have talked with elementary, middle, and high school teachers who have identical concerns and use similar methods. So I hope this issue of *The Leaflet* also demonstrates sensitivity to audience.

Susan Monroe Nugent

Helping Beginning Writers Develop Writing Plans: A Process For Teaching Informational Writing In The Middle Schools And Beyond

Sandra Stotsky

Introduction

Most of the writing we need to do as adults for responsible and active citizenship is informational in nature. Whether this writing is in the form of a letter of inquiry or complaint to a government official, the minutes of a meeting, or a report for a community organization, it almost always contains facts and ideas organized in a logical way for specific purposes and people. Because informational writing is vital in a literate democracy, all students need to learn how to do this kind of writing well. Unfortunately, recent assessments by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (1977a; 1977b) have found that most students at all age levels fail to incorporate essential information and show little skill in overall organization when writing and revising reports and explanatory or persuasive letters. Clearly, informational writing needs to be taught far more effectively than it apparently is being taught.

Instruction in informational writing begins in the elementary school. However, there are several reasons why, in most elementary classrooms, students cannot easily learn how to organize facts and ideas logically in whole pieces of writing for specific purposes and readers. First, most of the writing children ordinarily do in the language arts class does not require them to reason out a logical organization for their information. Fictional, biographical, and autobiographical stories usually follow the natural order of time, while suggestive descriptions and poetic pieces of writing do not typically have a structure that must be reasoned out. When book reports are assigned, their structure is almost always given by the teacher. Consequently, children have little experience in reasoning out a logical order for information in the writing they do in the language arts class.

Second, few, if any, language arts teachers are able to find enough real purposes and audiences for the informational writing they assign over the course of a school year. Consequently, much, if not most, of the informational writing children do in the language arts class is basically arhetorical — that is, there is no genuinely interested reader for the content of the writing or any intrinsic purpose for the assignment — and children often seem to have little motivation for it. I suspect that this is certainly true of all those dreadful

biographies of famous people that children are always writing. And I suspect that this is probably true of most book reports children write, unless they are written specifically for other children and kept on file for their active use.

Third, although children do much more informational writing in the content areas than in the language arts class, few content area teachers are able to give their students much experience organizing facts and ideas in whole pieces of writing. There are several reasons for this situation. To begin with, most of the writing in the content areas is done to demonstrate to the teacher that some body of knowledge has been acquired. In order to assess, comprehensively and efficiently, what their students are learning, most teachers use a question format that requires little more in writing from their students than single words, sentence fragments, or, at best, isolated sentences. Although children should and can be taught to answer questions in clear and complete sentences (see Boyce, 1983, for several techniques teachers can use), it is not practical for teachers to substitute whole pieces of writing for most quizzes or workbook pages. On the other hand, some of the other informational writing children do in the content areas is necessarily fragmentary, e.g., labels for plants and animals, captions for pictures, or information for weather charts.

Unfortunately, when whole pieces of connected discourse are assigned in the content areas (e.g., a report on an animal), the task of making sure that 25 to 35 students have each found enough information and the right information for their own individual piece of writing is enormously time consuming for even the most organized teacher. Even more time consuming is the task of helping 25 to 35 students individually with the process of working out a reasonable organization of the information in a well-structured piece of writing. There are many teachers who do allot time for this kind of individual help once or possibly twice a year — usually for a library research report — but it is the rare teacher who allots (or can allot) this kind of time on a regular basis throughout the school year. Moreover, should a teacher decide to set aside the time needed for helping 25 to 35 individual students find and organize information for 25 to 35 different topics, he or she then faces the task of managing the classroom during this period of time. A teacher needs many resources and extraordinary classroom management skills to keep all the other children academically engaged for long periods of time while he or she helps one child at a time with the content and organization of the first draft of a piece of informational writing. Consequently, it is not surprising that most children have little regular experience in the content areas

working out a logical structure for their information and ideas in whole pieces of written discourse.

Nor is it surprising that there is rarely any revising process for informational writing in the content areas. Given the amount of time needed for helping children locate, gather, and organize information for the first draft of the few whole pieces of writing they do, most content area teachers are not apt to spend much time on the development and revision of the *content* through draft stages, especially in a lengthy piece of writing. Consequently, most children are apt to have little experience learning how to develop the content of a piece of informational writing. Moreover, most library research reports or other lengthy pieces of writing done in the content areas are written only for the teacher or for classmates (e.g., reports on animals may be anthologized in a mini-encyclopedia for class use). As a result, children have virtually no experience learning how to develop and shape whole pieces of writing that incorporates content area material for a variety of purposes and for readers who are less familiar with the content than their teachers or classmates may be.

Finally, when language arts textbooks themselves are examined, we find that report writing is usually taught in a completely individualized (and, hence, time consuming) way, while the logical structure of any other kind of informational writing that may be suggested for teaching in these textbooks (e.g., instructions, a business letter, or a book report) is usually *given*.

Over the past several years, I have worked out a process for teaching informational writing that I believe addresses some of the difficulties we face in teaching it effectively. The process was developed in demonstration classes for elementary and junior high school teachers with children at all levels of writing development. At the heart of this process is the development with the class of a common writing plan for a piece of informational writing for which they already have the information. The common writing plan helps all students at one and the same time to produce a copious and coherent first draft. The teaching process is a simple one. First, a purpose and a reader are worked out for a particular piece of informational writing, such as a letter to a bookstore manager about a book the class has read. Then, the class learns how to generate a large number of questions that this particular piece of writing should or could answer for its intended reader. Finally, they learn how to organize these questions logically in a writing plan for a multiparagraphed composition. Because the development of a writing plan can take place in short, whole-class lessons, teachers can plan more informational writing assignments than they have been able to

and give their students needed practice in asking questions about a variety of subjects and in working out a logical structure for many different pieces of informational writing.

If students can have frequent experiences developing writing plans with their classmates, they may acquire a process that they can use on their own in informational writing. Moreover, they may also acquire a skill in asking questions and in reasoning with verbal material which they can apply to their informational reading as well.

Bruner (1981) has recently discussed the importance of instructional scaffolding — of providing a structure for language learning that the student uses, internalizes, and then controls on his or her own. The teaching process I have worked out for informational writing is consistent with this notion and is designed for teachers who believe that teaching is as active a process as learning. The purpose of this article is to describe this process in detail, show how it may draw upon both personal knowledge and the subject matter of any academic subject for its content, and suggest how teachers may be able to specify a variety of purposes and readers for their children's informational writing. I will also offer samples of children's writing based on its use which will enable teachers to judge its effectiveness.

Topics for Writing Plans

In order to develop a common writing plan, the class needs to be able to write about the same general topic. This can be handled in two different ways. First, one can use a general topic that can be exemplified by a large number of specific subjects within the children's personal knowledge. One example of such a general topic is an explanation of a game. Most children know how to play a number of games well. And even though each child will write about a different game, the teacher can develop a common writing plan because they are all writing about the same general topic. Motivation is usually tapped when children can make choices within a general topic.

Topics can also be based on a recent class experience or unit of study (e.g., if the class has just seen a special exhibit at a local museum or has completed a study of the solar system or celestial objects in the science class). An example of such a topic might be an explanation of a model of our solar system or a short description of different types of celestial objects for another class. Often a "fact-storming" session is helpful before questions are generated to refresh what the children have seen or learned.

In general, the topic must be broad enough so that the children can generate a large number of potentially relevant questions and the kind of questions that will elicit answers containing a variety of

facts and ideas. Otherwise, there will be a much less rich question base, and the children will be apt to use the same information in their writing. The topic should also lend itself to the possibility of a logical structure of at least several parts. The reasons for this will be made clear in the section on developing the writing plan.

Purposes and Audiences for Informational Writing

Purpose and audience are the two most important concepts in informational writing. An initial understanding of purpose and audience determines both the content and the order of ideas and information in a piece of informational writing and is fundamental to its effective development. Although some of the writing children do in the elementary school does not need an explicit statement of purpose in the introduction, children do need to learn that they should always begin developing a piece of informational writing by thinking about its purpose; at higher levels of writing, a thesis statement proceeds directly from a clear understanding of purpose. Many language arts educators and textbooks often use the term "focus," rather than "purpose," but these two terms are not necessarily synonymous. The focus of a piece of writing may simply be its topic or subject matter (e.g., "bicycles"); whereas the purpose is more clearly a statement indicating what the writer plans to do with the subject matter for a particular reader (e.g., "to describe different types of bicycles in use today," "to explain how to repair bicycles," or "to show how bicycles have changed over the years").

Teachers can specify — far more easily than many of them have — a variety of purposes and readers for their students' informational writing in at least two different ways. First, letter writing should be undertaken much more often than it is; informational letters can be sent regularly to many different audiences and they almost always entail an opening, adequate introductory information, a logical arrangement of the content in several paragraphs, and a closing — the essential features of a good piece of informational writing. Children can write critiques of newly published children's stories for the manager of a local children's bookstore (see Appendix I). They can also write letters to parents, grandparents, or far-away friends describing school assembly programs or any other school event the class attended or participated in. They can also write letters regularly to parents about what was learned from class trips, from special class projects, or from even smaller units of classroom work (see Appendix II). Writing assignments that entail a real or potentially real use of information and ideas outside of the classroom can often help students integrate material from the content areas far more meaningfully than can writing directed only to the teacher or other

classmates. For example, what better way for a grade 7 class in western North Carolina to integrate knowledge gained from an ecology unit on endangered species than by writing a letter to the president of a local lumber company conveying concern about the possible destruction of the natural habitats of several endangered species (see Appendix III).

The second way in which teachers can provide students with a range of readers and purposes is by extending the notion of reader beyond what is real to what is imaginary. Informational writing in a school setting does not preclude role-playing; so long as the information and ideas are real, the audience and/or the point of view of the writer may be imaginary. For example, students of a grade six class who had seen *The Search for Alexander* at a local museum showed what they understood about the significance of the artifacts they had seen by pretending they were museum tour guides and writing an overview of the exhibit for an imaginary group of visitors. (See Stotsky, 1984, for many other examples.) This method for extending the range of possible readers and purposes for informational writing can be used most profitably in the content areas. Writing from a personal point of view, whether real or imaginary, about what has been learned or is being learned not only shows how well children are integrating a body of knowledge but also tends to be more lively than a straightforward report.

Forms or Genres for Informational Writing

The form of the piece of writing (e.g., explanatory essay or letter) also needs to be given or worked out by the class. The form must, of course, make sense to children and be within their realm of experience. If models can be made available, examined, read, and discussed, so much the better. Fortunately, models of many forms that teachers may not often think of using for informational writing are available and easily used by middle grade students: travelogues, descriptions of floor plans for homes or public buildings, museum tour talk guides, eulogies, and obituaries. All these forms of informational writing require a logical arrangement of facts and ideas in a structured piece of connected discourse and readily lend themselves to a strong personal perspective.

Generating Questions for the Writing Plan

Before students begin to generate questions about a topic, the topic needs to be discussed thoroughly, not only to motivate the children but also to clarify exactly what the topic is. Moreover, discussion of the topic stimulates each child to begin to think about what particular subject he or she may wish to write about if the stu-

dent will be choosing a specific area of a general topic; having a particular subject in mind helps children to generate more relevant questions about the topic.

Questions are generated about the topic as soon as a large number of specific possibilities for the topic have been volunteered and the range of possibilities has been established. The students are asked to think of the kinds of information that their readers might want to know or that they might want to tell their readers, for example, what questions should their writing try to answer. Once they understand what a question-raising brainstorming session is in contrast to the traditional information-producing brainstorming session, they rarely have any difficulty generating questions in future writing lessons. And once students begin to understand the nature of the questions needed for a particular topic, large numbers of questions are generated, with more and more students gradually participating in the process. Moreover, as children begin to have a specific subject in mind, questions raised by one child on one subject often suggest somewhat related questions to other children. For example, while generating questions about a game to explain to peers, one child, thinking of *Dungeons and Dragons*, volunteered, "What time-frame does the game take place in? Present, past or future?" Another child, thinking of tennis or baseball, then suggested "Do you play the game in any special season?" This kind of cross-fertilization may stimulate an awareness of many potentially critical attributes of a subject.

The importance of teaching children to ask questions and to ask good questions cannot be stressed enough. Too much instructional time in all subjects consists only of teachers asking questions. Children need far more experience in asking questions. It is asking questions that leads to the search for answers. Indeed, the development of knowledge begins with asking questions.

Developing the Writing Plan

As soon as there seem to be enough questions for a particular class or group of students to use, the writing plan can be developed. Although two-part plans are possible and may be used in the primary grades, three-part plans or more are much more useful and beneficial. Children learn to sort the questions into at least three functional groups corresponding roughly to the general structure of an opening or introductory part, a main part or body, and a closing part. A three part plan helps children think about where a piece of informational writing is going when they begin to arrange the questions. It makes students think about what kind of information their readers should begin and end with, given the particular purpose of the piece of writing. A teacher's guidance is important at all times,

but is especially so when children are attempting to reason out a sequence of ideas.

Organizing the questions into several groups is an exercise in logical thinking which should take as much time as necessary. Working out the logical relationships between abstract ideas in a piece of writing is a process developed primarily in school and needs far more time to develop at all grade levels than most teachers realize. As children decide in which part a question might logically belong, the teacher must constantly ask for reasons or justifications for their choices. If a question that might more logically be placed in the third part is suggested for the introduction, then the teacher might ask the child which questions could logically follow that one or if any other questions might need to precede that one to clarify the information its answer would provide. It will *often* happen that some questions may be logically placed in different parts; for example, somewhat different writing plans may be possible for the same purpose and reader. All these alternate plans should be accepted and listed as alternate plans.

After students seem to understand this part of the process, it is possible to let them select from the entire list only those questions that each thinks is relevant for the particular subject each has in mind. The children should feel free to place the questions in the order best suited to individual writing plans. It should also be pointed out to students that all questions in the list of questions, or in the common writing plan, do not necessarily have to be used and answered. Some questions will not be relevant to some specific subjects, and students will have to use their own judgment.

The important principle for students to learn is that the order of information in a piece of informational writing should be thought out logically, not that there is necessarily only one logical order for the information. Ultimately, they will learn that thinking carefully about the exact purpose of the piece of writing and what they want the reader to remember most or to do with the information will probably determine the precise order of information.

In the middle grades, there is one step in the process which can be taught when students are able to generate a large number of questions. The students can try to group the questions into clusters that each seem to relate to a specific category, even if the category isn't explicitly named, and then order the clusters into a multi-part structure. The middle part can always be expanded to include more than one cluster, if students have come up with more than three clusters. Grouping questions into clusters can also lead to paragraphing.

Once the writing plan is finished, with most of the questions listed for each part, the teacher can point out that each part, when written

into sentences, will probably constitute at least one paragraph. Much, of course, depends on the number of questions generated and the amount of information children bring to a part. The main part of a writing plan could consist of several paragraphs. *At all times,* students need to be encouraged to go beyond what the questions may elicit and contribute additional information of their own. The writing plan is *not* designed to be a rigid outline or guide for all the information in a student's paper. For this reason, teachers must be careful to keep all the questions loosely arranged in each part (i.e., not deliberately ordered in a particular sequence) and must try to make sure that their students don't just write a complete sentence as an answer to each question, then place the sentences in a sequence, producing stilted and uniform paragraphs. The questions should simply stimulate the individual ideas each student will come up with for each part; functionally similar paragraphs on different papers may easily have their content arranged in different ways.

A major objective of this part of the process is to help children understand that an informational paragraph is based on a group of ideas that are closely related to each other in a logical way. Children can more easily understand what an informational paragraph is after they have inductively developed its substance, especially in relation to the substance for several other logically related informational paragraphs. An understanding of the nature of an informational paragraph can be one of the major benefits of the writing plan. At this point, however, students need to learn what an informational paragraph is, not in order to learn how to write a well-developed informational paragraph of any specific type, but in order to learn to paragraph at all, and specifically how to paragraph informational writing.

In informational writing, the organization of thought is as important as the content of thought. It is difficult for children to learn how to paragraph informational writing for at least two reasons. First, children have little opportunity to read and absorb models of good informational writing in school; most of the reading they do in elementary school reading programs is narrative in structure, while informational selections used in reading comprehension exercises are not high quality pieces of writing. Second, we have no clear-cut rules for paragraphing informational writing, as we do for narrative writing. For narrative writing, one indents: (1) when conversation is introduced, (2) when the speaker changes, (3) when the narrative picks up again after dialogue, (4) when the scene shifts for any length of time, and (5) when the writer moves from one character to another for any length of time. All of these rules are easy to memorize and observe.

On the other hand, paragraphing for informational writing is based on identifying a distinct cluster of ideas that are related logically to each other and to an explicit or implicit topic sentence. To advise children to indent when they begin a new main idea doesn't usually mean much, especially to elementary school children because they often don't know when they have begun a new main idea. So far as they are concerned, they are still writing about the same general idea if they are on the topic at all. The fact that a new group of sentences may all be about a different aspect of the topic is often too fine a distinction for children to make without help or some sort of outline to follow. A writing plan helps children learn to organize their ideas not only by teaching them to arrange questions about ideas in parts, or in clusters and then in parts, but also by teaching them to paragraph and where to paragraph.

Moreover, I believe it is easier — and more important — for elementary school children to learn first to arrange ideas, or clusters of ideas, logically in relation to a particular purpose for writing than to learn how to develop "one good paragraph." The hierarchical thinking necessary to develop a topic sentence and the logical sequencing of supporting sentences within one paragraph is very difficult to teach and is probably more easily developed after children have learned to arrange clusters of ideas logically in relation to their controlling idea — the purpose of a piece of writing — and then to write the clusters as paragraphs. It is possible that the emphasis on constructing well-developed, single-paragraph compositions in most elementary school writing programs, especially in the early grades, may be one of the primary causes of the excessively long single-paragraph essay at the high school level and beyond.

In as natural a way as possible, developing writers must be helped from the very beginning to create multi-paragraph compositions and to demonstrate visibly an organization of their ideas. Developing a piece of informational writing should proceed from sensing the structure of the whole to refining its parts (and then back to refining the structure of the whole). Consequently, informational paragraphs should almost always be seen as functional as well as structural units of thought. This may be accomplished by developing and using the kind of writing plan I have described in this article. To help teachers understand more clearly what a writing plan is, Appendix I shows a possible writing plan for an assignment asking children to explain a game they know well (without telling its name), together with a first draft from one fourth grader who used that plan.

Several important points about writing plans need to be stressed. First, I am not recommending their use for personal/expressive/narrative writing. Generating questions is a stimulating pre-writing

technique for any kind of writing, but a writing plan may inhibit a desirable flow of ideas in first drafts of personal/expressive writing. Informational writing, on the other hand, benefits from planning and reflecting before and during writing the first draft. This is especially true of timed academic writing and of civic and occupational writing in any setting. Second, for informational writing in which students must gather information through interviews, observations, or outside reading, it is better for students to take notes and gather information *after* they have generated or clustered research questions but *before* they develop a writing plan. It is premature to order questions or clusters of questions into a writing plan before students know which questions or clusters are productive and can really be addressed. Moreover, the exact focus or purpose of the paper may be clarified or changed after the student has done some reading or has started gathering information. Students may also find important new questions or clusters to add. Third, a writing plan should always be considered as a tentative plan. The word *tentative* is too cumbersome and difficult to use with young students, but they do need to understand that even the plan can be devised or changed. This will be particularly true when students discover missing information or gaps in the logical structure of their research reports or long essays as they proceed through several drafts and see other, better ways to organize their ideas. First, they learn to use the writing plan to revise their first drafts. Later, they learn to use what happens in their drafts to revise their plans — the recursive process that skilled writers use.

In sum, then, a writing plan may be seen both as the result of a thinking process and as the means by which thought and language are guided during composing a first draft. Its development obviously helps students to think about and tentatively organize ideas before writing. The plan itself provides the substance for at least several paragraphs and can be used to teach children to paragraph informational writing. A writing plan also helps students to monitor and maintain control of the flow of their ideas once they begin writing a first draft. In my experience, better writers seem to refer constantly to the writing plan while they are composing the first draft; less able writers do not seem to use one as easily at first, especially one with many questions, and may need experience using writing plans with a small number of questions in order to develop control of the structure of a piece of informational writing.

Summary

Informational writing is writing that organizes ideas and facts in a logical way for specific purposes and specific readers. To learn how to do this kind of writing well, students need several experiences

working out a logical structure for a piece of informational writing with a specific purpose and reader. Unfortunately, the constraints of large-group instruction in most elementary schools prevent most teachers from giving their students sufficient individual help with this process. In this article, I have described a teaching method that gives students experience with this process through whole-class lessons. In these lessons, the class learns how to ask the questions that a particular piece of writing should or could answer for its intended reader and, then, how to arrange these questions logically in a writing plan that enables them all to produce an adequate and organized first draft. If students can develop a writing plan for many different pieces of informational writing, they may acquire a process that can be used to plan pieces of informational writing to use in their other schoolwork or in their adult lives outside of school.

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I would like to acknowledge the following three references as the source of the ideas that stimulated me to work out the process described in this article:

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Mina Shaughnessy Scholar and Research Associate
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Appendix I

326 E 93 St
N.Y. N.Y. 10028
Jan. 28, 1983

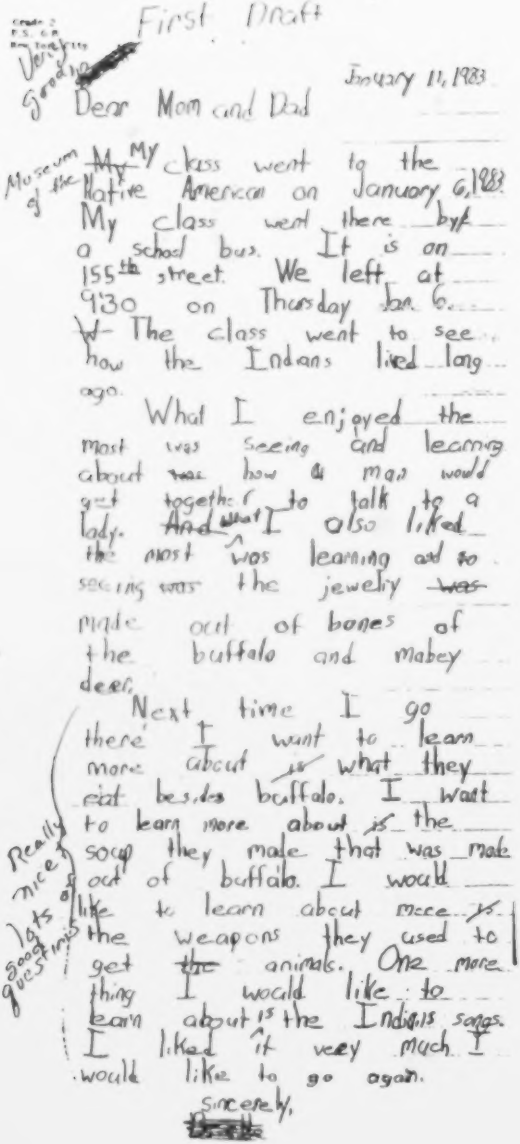
Grade 4
P.S. 6 M
New York City

Dear Eeyores,

Our teacher read us part of the book "Letters To Phil" by Gene Schermerhorn you lent her. She asked us our opinion. She only read 4 of the letters but in the next paragraph I will give you as much information about my opinion of the book.

I thought the book was between good and boring. It had way too many details. Also the pictures were too small. I also thought the book was enjoyable in some parts. Like when they said that 8th street was the middle of the town.

I think you should buy this book but only for older children because the book would 1. not interest many small children 2. the writing is a little hard and 3. What does a small child care about old New York?



First Draft

January 11, 1983

Dear Mom and Dad

Museum of the ~~My~~ My class went to the Native American on January 6, 1983. My class went there by a school bus. It is on 155th street. We left at 930 on Thursday Jan. 6. ~~W~~ The class went to see how the Indians lived long ago.

What I enjoyed the most was seeing and learning about ~~was~~ how a man would get together to talk to a lady. ~~And~~ What I also liked the most ^was learning and to seeing was the jewelry ~~was~~ made out of bones of the buffalo and mabey deer.

Next time I go there I want to learn more about ~~is~~ what they eat besides buffalo. I want to learn more about is the soup they make that was make out of buffalo. I would like to learn about more ~~is~~ the weapons they used to get ~~the~~ animals. One more thing I would like to learn about is the Indians songs. I liked ^it very much I would like to go again.

Really nice

lots of good questions

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Appendix III

Second Draft

Grade 7
Rutherford County, Public Schools
North Carolina

Dear Sir, I want to let you know that your company is endangering the bald eagle. You might think it is surprising but when you cut down trees most of them are on eagles home Also when the trees fall they can destroy other animals home and other animals life. I wanted to let you know because I care about endangered animals. I hope you care too and will do something about it.

Other examples of animals that are endangered or extinct are the buffalo, passenger pigeon, mule deer, seal, and of course the bald eagle.

We have done a lot to prevent extinction but sometimes we are to late. Some of the things we have done are, we made laws to prevent hunting these animals, we have made sanctuaries and planted trees. We have also stopped the use of D.D.T. We have done a lot but you can help by planting trees and be more careful about forest fires.

We want to save the bald eagle because it is our national symbol and it represents our freedom. Also it can help us by killing rodents and snakes.

Thanks you

Writing Plan

	Opening sentence
First Part	What kind of game is it? Who can play it? Where can it be played? How many players can play it? What are the pieces or equipment you need to play it?
Second Part	How does the game begin? What are the rules of the game? What happens as you play the game?
Third Part	What is the object of the game? What happens to winners? to losers? How does the game end?
	Closing sentence

P.S. 6
4-301

[redacted]
2/1/23

Mystery Game

In this game the players are people in the mid-evil times. Usually 3 people or more play. You can play with 2 but its more exciting with more than 2 people. It is a dice roleing game.

In this game you usually pretend your in a dungeon, fighting monsters. After you kill the monsters are dead you can get their treasure. You make characters so you know what kind of things you own and how much treasure you have. In this game you can be a fighter, cleric, magic user, thief, elf, if you're a elf, cleric, magic user you can have spells.

The object of the game is to get a lot of treasure. The game never ends until you get killed.

A fine first draft, [redacted]

The Peer-Group Conference: Rediscovering a Forgotten Audience

Chris M. Anson

Although the concept of "audience" has dominated rhetorical theory for at least two thousand years, only recently have we begun to think of it developmentally, as central to the growth of individual literacy. Thanks to the work of Piaget and other developmental psychologists, for example, we now know something about the way that young children move out of their "egocentric" speech as they become more aware of the needs of their audience. By the time they reach high school and college, students are usually quite adept communicators in face-to-face, social situations, picking up subtle cues from their listeners and adjusting their speech accordingly. But as many composition researchers have shown, developing this audience sensitivity seems to lag behind in most students' *writing*. As teachers, then, we are faced with a difficult problem: how to bridge this gap — how to use our students' tacit knowledge of audience to help them become mature writers of what Linda Flower has called "reader-based prose" (Flower, 19-37).

Peer-group conferencing may be one solution to this problem. Unlike occasional group editing in class, peer-group conferencing involves a sustained effort at building students' awareness of audience by helping them become their own and each other's best readers.

Unfortunately, the peer-group method still stands on the fringes of our national effort to improve students' writing abilities. Why should this be so? First, many educators are not satisfied with teachers' testimonials about the method; they seek some greater theoretical rationale than what can come from intuition and experience. Second, we do not know very much about what goes on in peer conferences — what sorts of things the students focus on and the nature of the *language* they use when they discuss each other's writing. In the following pages, I hope to lend some additional support to peer-group conferencing by touching briefly on both of these matters.

Some Theoretical Justification for Peer Conferencing

In most writing situations, the writer builds a representation of the "audience" which then guides subsequent linguistic and rhetorical choices. As skilled writers compose and revise their prose, they recognize a kind of productive tension between *what* they want to say and *how* they are saying it. That second pole of the tension — the *embodiment* of communicative intentions — is not something that can be coded into a set of rules or principles, for it differs from con-

text to context, from purpose to purpose. Writers do not risk being *wrong* with respect to their audience, only myopic, insensitive or misguided, and this depends largely on the situation surrounding the writing and reading events.

The concept of audience in the writing class, however, is complicated by the educational intentions embodied in the curriculum. From the students' point of view, the most important audience is the teacher, the person responsible for judging the quality of the writing they produce. At the same time, teachers often expect their students to produce "autonomous" texts, texts that presume some *other* audience, some nebulous reader beyond the classroom who represents people in the "real world" and their reading processes. The resulting web of real and imagined audiences is likely to entangle the student as she attends now to the hidden agendas in the teacher's assignment, now to the meaning she is trying to convey, and now to that "imagined" reader, a kind of gatekeeper of literacy, referred to, but never described by her teacher. Without knowing something about that other context — why they would be writing in the first place, and why people would be reading their texts — students cannot use their representations of "the reader" to help them make wise choices as they compose. People do not, for example, normally read and write five-paragraph themes, yet many textbooks routinely give the impression that there is a large body of educated readers who spend their leisure time absorbed in published collections of this genre. In actuality, the overriding pedagogy of the classroom turns much of the students' writing into what James Britton has called "dummy runs," those pale imitations of "real" writing whose only purpose is to measure the student's control of mechanical skills. Because dummy-runs have no non-academic audience, the concept of readership collapses under the weight of its own artificiality.

In recognizing this problem, some theorists suggest that we abandon the concept of audience altogether and admit to ourselves (and our students) that as teachers we are their primary audience. In a recent issue of the *Connecticut English Journal*, for example, Purves argues that the teacher represents a "rational reader," a surrogate for the world of neatness, accuracy, and organization. Paying so much attention to the "audience," Purves (43-44) contends, neglects too many aspects of school writing, such as problem-solving, style, and form.

This solution, however, raises the hackles of many who believe that students write for — and receive feedback from — too limited a range of audiences. Ample evidence shows that by the time most students reach college, they have produced the bulk of their writing

in the classroom, and precious little of it has ever been read by people other than their teachers.

So we are left with a theoretical dilemma: ignore the concept of audience and risk leaving our students stagnating in teacher-centered writing, or continue referring to a concept that, in the classroom, we find extremely difficult to define in a way that will be helpful to our students.

We can, of course, build into our writing courses some extra-curricular purposes and contexts for writing and reading. Students can write letters to the editor of a local newspaper, compose stories and poems for literary magazines and contests, or design informative pamphlets of the kind often distributed free in drugstores and supermarkets. But the problems attendant upon such a composition course are many, not the least of which is finding enough varied outlets for the students' writing. And many educators would claim that such extra-curricular writing does little to prepare the students for the more immediate demands of their educational careers.

Peer-Group Conferencing: The Missing Link

If the composition class represents a microcosm of the world beyond the classroom, it is dismaying to consider how seldom its participants read and write together. In spite of the constant cry for more process-oriented, workshop-like writing curricula, we perpetuate a literate tradition in which writing and reading are isolated, private activities. Just as students of the nineteenth century listened to lectures about proper style, composed in quietude, and received teacher feedback in the form of marginal abbreviations of textbook errors, many students today produce mounds of pre-writing, drafts, and revisions without ever seeing each other's work.

Part of the reason for this lack of attention to the social dimensions of literacy comes, I believe, from our general distrust of students' critical abilities. Time and again, I hear educators describing peer-group criticism as "the blind leading the blind." What possible worth, these teachers ask, can come from one student reacting to another's writing? After all, students are apprentices in need of a master, players without a coach. The last thing they should get is more misguided advice from the flawed, sophomoric thinking of their classmates.

In an effort to discover whether peer-group conferencing really does provide students with useful, immediately beneficial audience feedback, I have been analyzing tape recordings of my own students' peer-group meetings. Interestingly, the idea for these tape recordings came from the students themselves, who suggested that I bring a cassette recorder to our meetings and tape for each of them, on their

own cassette, that part of the session in which we would discuss their writing. They could then replay the conference meetings as they continued to revise and re-think their essays. Before I turn to these tapes, however, a word needs to be said about the context in which we use the peer method.

Peer conferencing is an integral part of the writing program I help to coordinate at the University of Minnesota. In a typical unit of the freshman composition course, for example, the students work for a week or so composing rough drafts of their papers. On a given day, each student brings in four copies of his or her draft to circulate among the members of a term-long conference group established at the start of the course to be compatible with the students' schedules. The following class is cancelled, and each conference group meets independently with the teacher to discuss the members' writing. In preparation for these conferences, the students are asked to read and respond to their group members' drafts. Most teachers provide their students with lists of good questions to ask about the drafts, and these can be supplemented with more specific points of focus for individual units.

During the conference meetings, the teacher says very little. The students are encouraged to talk to each other instead of "through" the teacher. In this way, the teacher acts as a *facilitator* of the group conferences; her presence helps to avoid the "chit-chat" that often creeps into peer-revision sessions when they are conducted during regular class meetings.

At first, some groups need some time to become acclimated to what for them is an unusual academic activity, especially in college. However, the group soon establishes a sense of membership and an agenda for achieving common goals in the course. In many ways, the group meetings become, for the students, more important and useful than anything else in the course, and they are unanimously enthusiastic about them in their course evaluations.

The most striking feature of the peer-group conferences is the extent to which they reveal the students' "hidden knowledge" about discourse. Contrary to many educators' beliefs, even relatively unskilled students bring into our classes a wealth of tacit knowledge that the conference groups seem to bring to the surface. Consider, for example, the following excerpt from a typical freshman conference, conducted early in the term. The four students (Bob, Cathy, Rob, and Sally) are discussing Bob's essay on the problem of football injuries. From a teacher's point of view, Bob needed to work most on his organization, consolidating like ideas into single sections of the paper. Several paragraphs dealt with ideas that had been raised in

earlier paragraphs, and the entire piece was full of distracting redundancies. Here, the group has just started to talk about the essay (my own comments are italicized):

S: I read it and I understood everything it said, and everything was clearly written, and there were examples, and things like that; but for some reason my mind kept jumping around when I was reading it; it wouldn't sit still and focus on the different points that you want to make, and they're good points to be made.

R: Yeah, I had the sense that there's a real strong organization to the thing, you know, I got a sense, ok, now I'm talking about this; but like Sally said, it was jumpy . . .

C: Yeah, every paragraph was real . . . you knew what you were saying, but for some reason . . .

S: Then you get into the paragraph and it starts to . . . you see things looping back to other things.

R: Right, to other parts of the paper.

T: *Are there any specific places in the paper where . . .?*

S: I thought right in the first page, the end of the first page and the beginning of the second one might have been combined . . . where it says "beside the obvious affects," which should be *effects*, um, to the beginning of the next paragraph up to "that is needed," because that's all one idea.

R: Where? Oh, right, right. Good point.

In this excerpt, the group members are observing errors in Bob's paper which he has not noticed, perhaps because his self-critical skills are only just st[illegible]ng to develop. In responding as readers, the conference members are, in effect, "building" his audience awareness while enhancing their own. That awareness involves, as the exerpt suggests, the specific *effects* of textual concepts (such as organization) on the reading processes of real people. For Bob, Cathy's comment about her mind "jumping around" because of his paper's organization is much more powerful than a teacher's red pen, partly because it removes from writing the fear of being right or wrong and makes it what it is — a set of highly relativistic decisions.

Also revealed in the students' talk is a sense of priority: problems are put in their proper place, depending upon their severity. If the student's paper is generally well organized, without many grammatical and other surface errors, then the group tends to focus on less text-centered matters — the particular points the writer is making, how they react to them, and what the group members themselves got generally from the paper. On the other hand, if the paper's meaning is obscured by clumsy syntax or ambiguous phrasing, the group

members immediately point to the source of their confusion. And because students put a high price on the tone of their comments, they are never caustic or overly critical of the less skilled members among them. Instead, they become even more supportive, as if the group itself were functioning as a team.

Finally, the tapes document the students' concerns shifting from textual to contextual to pragmatic. In fact, not only do the students act as *real* readers of each other's work, but as "potential" readers, pointing out how others might respond. Several minutes of discussion about Bob's paper, for example, were devoted to its possible effect on someone not at all interested in football. In this sense, the conference members help each other to understand how writing functions both within *and* beyond the classroom. Considering how little of this knowledge needs to come from "above," we do our students a great service by using peer conferencing to help them make use of the knowledge lying dormant *within* them.

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William Perry and One Student Profile

Sue Rowe Doe

Last semester I had a student whose compositions and whose conversations with me suggested he was making profound changes in the way he viewed the world, changes that lend themselves to a William G. Perry, Jr. interpretation. To analyze this student's change, I would like first to describe Perry's work and its implications concerning writing instruction.

During the 1960s, Perry, a psychologist, interviewed Harvard undergraduates during each of their four college years in an attempt to monitor and document their intellectual growth. His findings, published in *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme*, describe a pattern of student progress through three major stages of philosophical assumption or what we might call "world views." Perry gave the names "dualism," "relativism" and "commitment in relativism" to the three world views. Perry's study implied that while passage through these stages does not necessarily occur in 18 to 21-year-olds (as does the cognitive development of children described by Piaget), such passage in college-age students is a desirable outcome of a liberal education. In fact, I believe Perry implies that successful socialization into the academic community could be defined as completion of the stages he theorizes.

Perry's first stage, dualism, is defined by a tendency to see the world in either/or terms. No question is unanswerable nor any answer vague. Point of view is synonymous with imprudent bias, and fact synonymous with truth. The dualist may find subjective evaluation by essay quite an inferior method to objective true/false and multiple choice procedures. The role of the instructor, as the dualist sees it, is to pass down the esoteric knowledge of the university.

The relativist (a student who has passed into Perry's second major stage of intellectual growth) has let go of the idea that right answers exist for all questions. He has found that such a view cannot account for the diversity of views found among his friends and teachers. He may take pleasure in this diversity and for a period immerse himself in paradox, seemingly treading water between points of view. In course work, he may feel compelled to present all sides of an argument, aiming for balance or fairness, and (to the distress of his teacher) find it impossible to state a thesis. Another variation is that he will seek to figure out the angle his teacher is looking for and will plug in this solution. Quite possibly the relativist will seek out discus-

sion for discussion's sake and prefer the instructor who will indulge him in conversation.

For the committed student, as for the relativist, there are no absolutes, but the committed student stops treading water and grabs hold of a rock. This is not an arbitrary choice of rocks but a choice informed by the emotional, spiritual, and intellectual inheritance of the student; his or her ethnic background, family values, personal experiences, religious heritage, and education provide a rationale for commitments. This student takes a point of view and also has the ability to critically examine his own data and methodology. He can compare his method with the method of others. He will think of his instructor as advocate or mentor.

Perry contends that the values with which one emerges from this developmental scheme are desirable because they are a responsible reply to the human predicament. Further, such values make tolerance of diverse contentions possible, an important consideration in a pluralistic society. Yet they also make possible informed commitment and decision-making. Clearly, however, the desirability of this passage is culture-bound and hardly value-neutral, as Patricia Bizzell (454) has pointed out, and when our academic institutions propel a student through these stages we must be prepared to admit that we are teaching *our* values, not the only values. We are encouraging them not to think but to think our way. Further, we must reconsider our sometimes glib assertion that good writing equals good thinking and that bad writing equals bad thinking. When students accept the scheme we press upon them, we must be prepared to watch their struggle going on, and this struggle may manifest itself in various kinds of stumbling. In compositions, focus, organization, and grammar may suffer while the student redirects energy from conventional expectations to better thinking. Indeed, at certain times, our exclusive concern over conventional criteria for compositions could obstruct student growth.

T.C. liked to talk, and talk he did about everything from his experiments with drugs to his worries about not having been a breast-fed infant to the dirty tricks he was playing on his roommate. His was my last conference on Tuesday, and he routinely stretched our twenty-minute conference to thirty minutes. He did not want to talk about his papers; he wanted to discuss issues in his life and in the culture. He wanted to know my views on the Ayatollah and on nuclear arms. Granted, I could have booted him out, but I was interested in why he was reversing the conference on me, testing my responses.

One of the first things he talked about was his resistance to the activity of writing. Although he had identified himself as an "incompe-

tent writer" in a self-evaluation filled out the first day of class, he made it a point to tell me he didn't want to learn to be a better one. He didn't want to take freshman comp (who *does*?), and was determined to make this an issue. He told me about a non-credit discussion course he was simultaneously taking where he was "really learning something." The course was called "Thinking about Thinking," and clearly this was one of those truly wonderful liberal arts courses that directly addresses plurality of views and methodologies. One of the subjects they considered, T.C. told me, was language and specifically the way that all languages restrict certain kinds of thinking. T.C. told me about the restrictiveness of the English language, which, as he pointed out, relies heavily upon nouns. He contrasted English to an American Indian language that relies more heavily on verbs and does not, as T.C. exclaimed to me, "even have a word for 'thing'!" He said that English-speaking people are mired down in nominalization, and that whereas Indians see life as fluid, we see life as a kind of stasis, arrested in static moments. "That," he said, "is why we're so afraid of dying."

Now linguists will recognize T.C.'s concept as a commonplace notion theorized by Benjamin Lee Whorf, but for T.C. this finding was a revelation, an epiphany. T.C. was a newborn relativist. He was trying ideas on for size, and, having rejected absolutes, he was also rejecting me as authority.

His early essays further support this. We were doing personal experience essays at the beginning of the course, and T.C.'s first papers were moral anecdotes. He would take the affected tone of a wise storyteller and write parables. His stories repeatedly involved a man who was smarter than everybody else in his village but who suffered from the ignorance of his people. One told of an ancient man who was ostracized from his village because he rejected the village values and searched for Truth. The story ended, with the old man finding Truth at the top of a mountain, where he sat for the rest of eternity and laughed at the stupid village. Questions as to how these stories related to his personal experiences shed all too little light on what T.C. was trying to do. Then I recalled that, when I asked the students to bring a keepsake to class, T.C. brought a book, a paperback that purported to be the memoirs of a Hopi chief. T.C., having discovered pluralism, was aspiring to a style of writing radically different from the traditional expectations of the university.

Was there value in what T.C. was doing? I believe Perry's answer would be an emphatic yes, and because of this I believe Perry offers a significant alternative to conventional criteria for judging student writing. Despite the dilemma his position presented for me, T.C. was growing.

Ultimately, the burden was lifted from my shoulders because although T.C. was unimpressed by me as an authority figure, he was not unimpressed by his classmates. Every student was required to submit an essay to be considered at a workshop, and the criticism of T.C.'s peers finally propelled him to attempt a conventional essay. When one of T.C.'s "search for truth" papers appeared in class, he assumed a look that suggested he was not listening to anything said by his classmates. When asked if he had any questions, he calmly replied no. The class was visibly angered; everyone approached the workshop with apprehension, and here was someone who let it all run off him like so much water. I'm sure now that this was not actually the case, but the class believed it so, and I could see them preparing to "get him" if ever another of his papers appeared before the class. When, weeks later, T.C. did in fact volunteer another paper, his classmates were harshly critical, and T.C. was reduced to asking if "anybody had anything good to say."

Whether peer pressure is good or bad I hesitate to judge. No doubt submitting to the university's will because it has become the class's will could represent a step backward into blind acceptance of authority or what Perry calls dualism. Indeed, it was shortly after this episode that T.C. wrote his first personal experience essay grounded in realistic details from his life.

Questioning in conference revealed, however, that T.C. had begun to conceive of his audience in a different way. When he saw that he was not communicating anything to his peers and somehow needed to, he began to consider a different standard, a more conventional one. In a sense the university community had been demystified for him, and he saw college for what it is when it is working best: a lot of different people trying to understand things in a lot of different ways. His objective became a search for the best way to make personal sense of things and to communicate his understanding. It was at this time that T.C. told me that in a kind of desperation he had let go of the idea of trying to be a great thinker and had instead written about what was important to him, "inadequate as that is," he said. In the process, and without knowing it, he had stepped from relativism to commitment in relativism. He was giving his best understanding and was no longer only playing with ideas but was making commitments.

Early in the semester he had started an argumentative paper on nuclear power. His plan for the paper was to take an advertisement by a consolidated group of pro-nuclear industries and dismantle it on the basis of what he said were false claims. It was a good idea, but his first draft failed to produce the kind of evidence we look for in support of an argument. I pointed him toward some articles and told

him he would be responsible for researching at greater depth. He went about his work but later abandoned the project because his reading proved the subject very complicated. I was disappointed he didn't have an essay but I was not particularly surprised, because by then I realized that for T.C. talking over ideas was one thing but making a personal judgment was another.

T.C. came back to this essay after his painful episode with the class workshop. From his realization that his nuclear power argument was weak, T.C. made a connection to a personal experience of significance to him. He remembered that he had argued with his father about his stand on nuclear power. "It seemed," T.C. said, "to go along with his drinking a Manhattan every night when he got home from work." Now he saw that for a long time he had been able to tolerate neither his parents' views nor their habits. He had believed them to be preoccupied with the mundane. Learning that his nuclear power argument was weak had important implications for T.C. It meant that his father's argument was at least as viable as his own. After all his criticism and now, after having to conclude that his parents' ideas weren't so stupid, T.C. "did not," as he wrote in his first conventional personal experience essay, "know how to tell them he loved them."

This more conventional essay opened doors for T.C. He found he could make commitments on paper, that he could discover his own best reasoning. For his next assignment he set out to discover why he had been setting boobie traps on his roommate, and the discovery here was similarly enlightening to him. His roommate was leaving at the end of the year and also had a new girlfriend. T.C. had been rigging their door with cans full of water and putting pennies between his roommate's sheets since he had started coming in late. In his paper, T.C. learned that he was jealous and that he couldn't bear the thought of losing his friend to a girl or to the end of the semester.

The change in T.C.'s general outlook after these papers was phenomenal. I don't think I would be exaggerating to say that he discovered within himself the capacity for great tolerance and warmth. He learned that he did not have to presume to know all in order to presume to investigate, and, beyond this, that he could persuade and analyze based upon his own investigations. He was learning to draw from his own life, to put his own values to work to understand issues and experiences. He was learning to apply his own criteria to his own evaluations. The composition, the vehicle in this case for reasoning and communicating, became a tool for his larger intellectual change. It may be that T.C. learned that college instructors are neither authoritarian defenders of some body of esoteric knowledge nor

idiosyncratic intellectuals to be variously befriended and figured out, but that, much like him, we are searchers of a sincere sort and that college is a community that supports such a search.

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Newburgh, New York

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ERIC/RCS Report: Teacher Commentary on Student Writing in the Process-Oriented Class

Margaret Mier

As attention shifts from the writing product to the writing process, teacher evaluations of student writing assume a new importance. In process approaches to writing instruction, the teacher's marginal notes and other written comments, far from being the final word on student writing, are part of a continuing dialogue and an aid to revision that can focus writers' attention on their audience's needs. Unfortunately, studies show that while teachers and researchers may have altered their perspective on commentary, students all too often react in a more traditional way, reading the evaluations quickly and making little use of suggestions. In studying the impact of teacher comments on student revisions, for example, Ziv [ED 203 317] found that writers frequently ignored or rejected teacher suggestions.

A review of recent research reveals three main reasons why students do not make more effective use of teacher commentary: they find it threatening to their self-esteem; they fail to recognize it as a reader's active response to their thinking, and they lack the skill or motivation to use evaluations to their full advantage. How can teachers use written commentary to engage students in assessing their own writing? The following ERIC materials discuss the characteristics of effective writing evaluations and suggest strategies for making teacher commentary count.

What Impact Does Teacher Commentary Have on Student Writing Confidence?

In a study of fourth-grade students, Bonds and her colleagues [ED 200 959] found that children receiving positive evaluations were relaxed, smiling, and confident during written sessions, while those receiving negative comments, though no less skilled as writers, were tense and embarrassed. Working with older students, Edelsberg [ED 202 042] found that to avoid painful loss of self-esteem, many writers react defensively to negative commentary, denying its validity or importance. If teachers are to prevent this defensiveness, Hagaman [ED 191 067] believes, they must establish a cooperative rather than an adversarial tone in their comments. He suggests that teachers adopt principles advocated by communication theorists:

(1) convey positive regard for students, recogniz-

ing their intelligence and honesty;

(2) show empathetic understanding of their ideas and feelings; and

(3) strive for positive rather than negative evaluations.

To demonstrate how teachers can build student confidence without undermining classroom writing standards, Hagaman critiques his own end comments on a group of college essays. On a paper discussing the dangers of government control, for example, he originally wrote, "The problems raised in the second-to-last paragraph are not resolved in the final paragraph." In reviewing the comment, however, he notes that it failed to show an understanding of the writer's feelings and purpose. A better response, he suggests, would have been the following: "I understand your concern about excessive government control and your anger is clearly communicated, but I'm troubled by the problems raised in your second-to-last paragraph which have no resolution in the close."

Even when not threatened by teacher criticism, students often see marginal and end notes not as a real reader's response but as part of an arcane system rarely met outside rhetoric or composition classes. To be most effective, written evaluations must help students move from writer-based to reader-based prose. They must develop students' audience awareness. One way to do this is to change the teacher's role from that of objective evaluator to involved reader. When comparing teacher and nonteacher responses to the same student writing, Hollman [ED 218 677] found that while "stockbrokers, journalists, biologists, [and] social workers" all readily admitted that their evaluations were influenced by the content of the writing, "most English teachers would say, 'Well, I suppose content does affect me but it *shouldn't*.'" In their efforts to rise above personal feelings or opinions and "see the paper pure," Hollman suggests, teachers frequently concentrate more on form than on content. This strained neutrality can alienate both teachers and students from the evaluation process, persuading students that writing is an empty exercise and increasing teachers' frustration with student work. Hollman argues that expressing reactions to the ideas in student work more openly will make teachers both happier and more effective evaluators.

Hagaman also believes that effective paper evaluations are impossible without teacher self-disclosure and authenticity. Not only do evaluators experience satisfaction in revealing their viewpoint, but students are readier to accept the evaluation once they understand its basis. A comparison of original and revised end notes on a

paper discussing the advantages of apartment living over dormitory living demonstrates how teachers can establish more direct communication with students by revealing their personal reactions.

Original: Give the opposition's views more attention, especially the advantages a dorm provides in convenience of location and food availability.

Revision: I understand the reasons you favor an apartment over the dormitory, but I can't feel moved to accept them, perhaps as a result of spending last summer in a dormitory with my family while I attended an institute for teachers. Have you considered the advantages of dorm living like convenience of meals, closeness to classes and libraries, and near maintenance-free upkeep?

A real sense of audience awareness is needed, not simply to give purpose to the act of writing and credibility to the written commentary, but particularly to help students make use of the commentary. In her case study of a college composition course, Ziv [ED 215 361] found that writers experienced a dissonance between their view of what they had written and their instructor's view. They attempted to resolve this dissonance in a variety of ways, including adhering strictly to editing instructions, defending what they had written and deleting problem words or passages. Ziv concluded that inexperienced writers did not always have the skills needed to apply teacher commentary to their texts.

Pferrer [ED 191 048] suggests that many students cannot make use of teacher commentary because they are creating writer-centered prose. Typified by unexpressed causal relations, undeveloped or supported ideas, and code words — with significance for the writer but not necessarily for the reader — writer-centered prose fails to take into account the reader's needs. Pferrer suggests that peer evaluation, especially when peers are instructed to role play puzzled readers, can help emphasize reader needs. Audience awareness can also be increased, Pferrer states, by having students read their own work aloud. When reading slowly, students are less likely to skip over unclear sections or rely on their memory or intentions for meaning.

These practices can help students become more sensitive to their reader's perspective, but how can teacher commentary help students move toward reader-based prose? Ziv has categorized marginal and end notes into two general kinds: implicit and explicit. Implicit comments are often questions encouraging students to rethink their

ideas, and explicit comments give specific instructions for overcoming a writing problem. An implicit marginal note on an unclear passage, for example, might begin, "Do you mean by this that . . .?" while an explicit might state, "To overcome 'x' confusion, you might do 'y' or 'z'." Which style of commentary is more effective? Research by Ziv [ED 203 317] shows that inexperienced writers need explicit comments but, as their skill in revising increases, they learn to make use of more implicit clues. Hagaman [ED 191 067] suggests, however, that both types of commentary should encourage students to explore new possibilities in their writing. Whenever feasible, he believes, explicit comments should suggest two or more options for students consider, rather than offering a single directive.

Effective written commentary is interactive. It involves writers in a dialogue with their reader, encouraging them to reconsider their work from their reader's perspective. By promoting audience awareness, positive commentary moves students from writer-based to reader-based prose.

In addition to the materials cited, the ERIC system contains a number of documents providing reviews of current literature on teacher commentary on student writing. These may be found by consulting monthly issues of *Resources In Education (RIE)* and the *Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE)* under the heading "Writing Evaluation."

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Call for Manuscripts

The editor of *The Leaflet* invites articles for possible publication in 1985.

Spring 1985: Literature for Children and Young Adults
Deadline for Manuscripts: March 1, 1985

1. Where is the place for children's and young adult literature in the curriculum? How is it integrated into the program of study?
2. Which authors and types of literature are especially enjoyed by students?
3. What bridges have been built between content areas through the study of this literature?
4. How do children's literature and young adult literature help students grow intellectually? emotionally?
5. Is there a difference between literature written *for* young adults and literature written *about* young adults?
6. How do you evaluate this literature? How do you determine what is worth studying? How do you select materials?
7. How can literature for children and young adults provide a transition to more mature literature?

Fall 1985: Controversial Issues in the Teaching of English

1. Which parts of the curriculum (e.g. what grammar to teach or what books to study) cause controversy within your school? How can teachers resolve such controversy?
2. Do you and your colleagues disagree about approaches (e.g. writing process vs. product) or methodology (e.g. small group vs. lecture)? What are some suggested compromises?
3. How do you view controversy? Should the profession take a stand on controversial issues?
4. Should we change traditional objectives for the non-traditional student?
5. What competencies should elementary students demonstrate? middle school? high school? college?
6. How can involvement in controversial issues benefit students?
7. What community issues (e.g. library policies) should involve the schools?

Composing in Context: Revision Strategies of Freshman Writers

Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater

Few teachers of composition fully appreciate the strong resistance to revision that most college students bring to the classroom. One of the subjects of my research offered this analogy to the revising process: "If you bang a nail once, you don't want to take it out and pound it back in again." Revision, for this student and many like him, carries with it the feeling of failure, of having to rebuild what wasn't constructed properly in the first place.

My research, conducted at the University of New Hampshire, examined the revising processes of six freshman students. It offers another way of seeing revision, focusing on the history of student writing over a period of time, following that initial resistance to the revision process, recording a breakthrough in attitude about revision and finally documenting the development of revision strategies. What I discovered in my work was that inexperienced student writers can and do revise both intensively and extensively; all six of my subjects made major changes in attitude toward revision and in their abilities to revise their drafts. Since these findings differ from the more controlled revision studies to date, I would like to share my research, which suggests methods for teaching in the classroom. In this study I feel that the instructional context is one of the tools necessary to understand the revision process.

Over the course of one semester I analyzed both the writing and the rewriting pattern of six randomly selected freshman volunteers who were enrolled in regular composition courses, taught by veteran teachers. My major data, in addition to the multiple drafts of their weekly papers, were hour-long taped interviews with the students about their writing processes. As a researcher what I discussed in these meetings were the roots of a piece of writing and its subsequent changes throughout the writing and revising stages. I spoke with students about which parts of their papers had given them difficulty, which changes they anticipated making in their papers, and how they evaluated their own work as well as how they thought their instructors would evaluate it. Since I was not the student's writing teacher, no directives or evaluations were given; I was the active listener and observer, watching how the student writer internalized the skills of revising. The advantage of this case-study methodology was that I could study subjects within their own instructional context over a period of five months, rather than use only a few writing episodes.

After listening to over fifty hours of taped interviews with my subjects, I constructed charts on the development of their revision strategies. Revision, for the purpose of the study, was defined as a recursive stage in the composing process, characterized by specific concerns about re-drafting. While these charts show revision development in stages, they are not intended to be linear. Most of the students in my project worked on several levels of concern with each paper they re-drafted, and, as a group, they moved away from Base Level, where no revision occurs, toward what I have labeled Level 3, where the student is revising outside the frame of his original intention. What I would like to highlight from my revision charts is the progress made by an average student writer taken from my case studies.

Allen is the student whose development could be considered most typical of the six. He came to freshman English with a cautious attitude toward writing and particularly about revising, somewhat akin to his tentative feelings toward being in college. He had worked for one semester before entering UNH so he could pay his own way and was determined to get something out of college. He wanted practical, tangible things. His high school English experiences included college prep classes where critical analysis and term papers were the major types of writing required. Allen equated this kind of writing with mathematical formula, "You just plug in the answers," he said. Allen's attitude toward school-sponsored writing was lukewarm at best, and his writing anxiety test revealed a negative attitude toward revision. And yet Allen engaged on his own in self-sponsored writing by keeping a journal and composing song lyrics. This student approached his first freshman English paper with apprehension because there was no specific assignment given other than to write five pages on a topic that interested him. After he had drafted a short piece on what it felt like to be onstage for the first time, Allen reported that his writing went easily, taking him less than an hour to compose. His own evaluation of the paper centered on its grammatical problems rather than its content. Allen's ability to find a topic with relative ease, his concern with what the teacher wants, his focus on mechanical aspects of writing, his lack of self-criticism about his product are all representative of Base Level on my charts, where no revision occurs. Writing at this stage is often viewed as inspirational; a student in my study reported, "My pen just started writing."

The voice in Allen's first paper is both stiff and rigid, mirroring perhaps his own static ideas toward the writing process. In a short, untitled piece, Allen skims the surface of this theatrical experience, producing a kind of writing that conveys no tension, no detail, no drama:

> Enroute to the prescribed position from which I would deliver my first line I remembered to smile. Facing the audience, I flashed a plastic grin which would put any toothpaste commercial to shame.

Allen anticipated that his instructor would go over his text with a red pen, an expectation that I found corresponded to Base Level where the student writer is composing primarily for a teacher audience. In conference with his instructor Allen found that this expectation was not met, that his teacher acted more as a sounding board than a critic. Thus in his second paper Allen seemed a little less anxious to direct his writing only to the instructor. He pushed himself to explore his own mixed feelings about being in college. Again he writes in a stiff and formal voice, but he struggles to incorporate a nautical metaphor to add depth to his first-person narrative. While the paper was not really successful, Allen again found his instructor encouraged him to continue drafting papers, offering him guidance but no grades or evaluation. "It's not what I'm used to in a teacher," Allen confided in our sessions. Allen's expectation toward his instructor's role was typical of all six students in my study, none of whom were used to selecting and shaping their own topics. This freedom in choosing subjects often placed a strain on the student, the kind of conflict anyone faces when he meets with a new attitude toward a familiar experience. William James, in his essay on pragmatism, explains this struggle:

> The individual has a stock of old opinions already but he meets a new experience which puts them to a strain. Somebody contradicts them; or in a reflective moment he discovers that they contradict each other; or he hears of facts with which they are incompatible; or desires arise in him which they cease to satisfy. The result is an inward trouble to which his mind till then had been a stranger, and from which he seeks to escape by modifying his previous mass of opinions. He saves as much as he can, for in this matter of belief, we are all extreme conservatives.

What Allen retains from his previous writing experiences is an ineffective writing voice that contrasts sharply with his fluid oral abilities. When I interviewed Allen, I often felt as if there were two people present in the room, one spoke in the dull writing voice, and the other in the dramatic speaking voice. What Allen struggled to change in his writing and what ultimately affected his ability to revise was his growing sense of audience. In his third paper Allen wrote about a topic that was important to him — his experience working with deaf children in a summer camp. He found the topic by re-reading his journal, looking for, he said, "a single experience

which made me question my values." While the topic satisfied him, Allen displayed his first real dissatisfaction with the writing, which represented his best effort to date. The paper didn't suit him because he knew and cared about the subject and could see that his draft in no way represented his complex feelings. From the paper, titled "Patience, Tolerance and Excedrin II," emerged Allen's first attempt at revision. Through a structural change — moving the ending of the first draft to the beginning of his second draft, Allen achieved a switch in mood and tone. And yet even with this revision Allen saw the paper as a candidate for further rewriting, even though he doubted his own ability to do it.

Allen's concerns about rewriting at this point are represented by Level 1 of my revision charts where the student begins to select a more personal subject. At Level 1 the student writer discovers that the teacher-audience is more of an obstacle than a help in the writing process. At this stage the student's obsession with rules begins to fade and is replaced by an attempt to expand or to experiment with his writing, as Allen did by reorganization of beginnings and endings. While there is a reluctance to revise at this level, it is usually due to the student's growing ability to criticize his own work. At Level 1, revision is still a mechanical process, with the paper passing through at least two drafts. Since the student's realization that revising is usually ahead of his ability to revise, he will block any major attempts at rewriting. Allen explained, "I know what needs to be revised, I am just not able to do it yet."

It was almost two months before Allen's writing skills and confidence had improved enough for him to completely rewrite his piece on deaf children. When he approached the topic again Allen had learned both the importance of distance and of stepping outside the original intent of his essay. He said in his interview with me, "When you are writing, you settle into a few basic themes and ideas. Then you go back a week or two later and write an entirely different paper on the same subject. The previous draft then becomes an exercise." In draft three of his paper, which he titled, "The Sounds of a Silent World," Allen switched his focus from his involvement in the camping experience to writing about the campers themselves. In his revision Allen masters the ability to narrate a story, create drama, and weave in background information as he opens his piece:

> Eugene was missing again. For the second time today, fifth time this week he had simply vanished. I was furious. How must it look, I thought, for a camp counselor to be losing track of his campers. I took a quick head count to make sure no others were gone, then stole out of the back

> of the arts and crafts cabin to find him. Luckily he had not strayed far. He was cooling himself off beneath a nearby lawn sprinkler. From the center of the deluge he smiled at me — his nearly white teeth contrasting to his black face and closely cripped Afro. My mind was racing to devise a suitable punishment for him as I prepared for an unscheduled shower. He was thoroughly delighted when I ran to where he stood, scooped him under one arm and returned to dry territory. Before I could scold him though, I broke down laughing which spoiled the stern mature image I had been working on all week. I attempted to lecture him but few of my words made sense. Eugene was deaf as were all of his peers at this camp.

Before this revision was accomplished Allen drafted what can be considered a "breakthrough" paper. At about mid-semester Allen composed a piece on the Boston transit system, which he titled "Rhythm City." Using as his focus the idea that the subway system operates to a subconscious beat, Allen writes in a fluid style:

> . . . It was becoming clear to me that not only was I moving to a subconscious beat but the whole system moved to the same beat. The trains had rhythm, the people had rhythm, the entire city had rhythm. The more I thought about it, the more the map of the subway system resembled veins and arteries, the lifelines of the city, all pulsating to the same urban heartbeat.

Allen seemed more satisfied with this paper, saying that the writing sounded more like him. His willingness to strain his writing voice moved him toward concerns of Level 2 on my revision charts where the student writer incorporates the self as part of his audience. At this level the writer displays a growing dissatisfaction with his topic, usually the result of peer feedback. Editing now gives way to drafting new material, and the organizational focus becomes internal rather than external. Revision at this level means content as the writer shifts from local to global concerns in re-drafting.

While not all of Allen's efforts after his breakthrough paper were successful ones, he was more willing to take risks with his writing. Sometimes, as in his revised paper on deaf children, his efforts reached the concerns of Level 3 on my charts where the student is writing primarily for himself, experimenting with topics and structures. At Level 3 the writer re-drafts material to find the revealing detail, to discover his themes and to heighten scenes as he often constructs an entirely new focus for his paper. No longer is the student bound by his original draft. He is willing to step outside his original frame and add, through revision, new meanings to his paper. The process of revision at this stage, it is understood, is a long one,

requiring some distance and time. "Revision," Allen said at the end of our project, "often means writing a whole new paper." His final evaluation of freshman English was "that it allowed me to improve my papers somewhat on my own through revising."

Vygotsky offers a way to understand the development of the revision strategies accomplished by the subjects in my study. "Developmental processes," he writes, "often lag behind learning processes creating a zone of proximal development." This zone, he explains, reveals the functions that are in the process of maturation. Many students in a composition course will not develop completely as revisers until after a writing course is finished and those skills are called into use again.

The success of my subjects' development in revision may be attributed to the rich instructional context in which these changes occurred. The two freshman composition courses from which my subjects were drawn were taught by experienced writing teachers, themselves writers. These teachers emphasized writing as a process of learning, encouraging students to take risks and to dare to fail. These instructors were not evaluators of student writing but empathetic listeners who were willing to wait for revisions, allowing the time and distance that in-depth revision requires. Both teachers shared the expectation that their students could and would master the skills of revision. The expectations of teachers, Mina Shaughnessy reminds us, powerfully influences what happens in the classroom. Both instructors offered many in-class writing exercises so that a student could incorporate new skills in his other weekly papers, but neither teacher gave specified topics or prescribed modes. Initially a few of my subjects, like Allen, displayed some apprehensions about this course structure but eventually all students learned to select interesting and meaningful subjects, often as early as in second papers. All students mastered the narrative/descriptive modes, and with these in common, each student attempted other forms of exposition usually covered in freshman English, always with respect to the demands of their topics. Both instructors required major revisions of papers when they felt the student was interested in the topic and capable of handling the skills of revising. Students were not required to revise every paper they wrote, but all rewrote at least two major pieces, to the extent that they could be counted as new papers. One student in the study summarized the impetus for revision this way: "When there are things that you know you want to change about your writing, not things the instructor wants you to change, then revision becomes a valuable process."

Another component to the success of these students' revisions

can be explained by the *use* of collaborative composing, which expands the audience beyond the instructor to include peers. Small group critiquing provides an environment ripe for change, enlarging the traditional one-to-one relationship between the teacher and student to the multiple responses provided by classmates. As Kenneth Bruffee points out in a letter in *College English*, collaborative learning gives students in the classroom "allies, accessories, other undergraduates who understand the basic problem: the anxiety and anger which often underlie resistance to learning."

In addition to the use of collaborative learning, both writing instructors employed the conference method of teaching to reinforce classroom skills, allowing students to discuss thoroughly a paper with an instructor before attempting rewriting. While none of the methods alone could account for the students' abilities to revise, the combination of these approaches under the guidance of expert teachers removed the students' resistance to revising and provided a context fertile for revision. The methodology of previous research on revision in part explains their negative findings thus far; no context was provided to produce meaningful revision efforts.

The student who comes to us in freshman composition often carried with him a rigid view of the revising process and a resistance to changing his own rewriting strategies. For in asking students to revise writing we are calling for them to change, to review and reconstruct the way they see their world and ideas, a demand that often corresponds to changing their opinions and beliefs. As teachers of English we must provide such students with an instructional context that is flexible and permeable enough to absorb a new attitude toward revision. This context implies an elasticity in our own attitude toward revision — allowing students to experiment with revisions over a period of a semester. Since revision assumes both distance and time, further research on revision patterns must necessarily be longitudinal, like Calkins work on second graders' revising patterns. Not only should students be followed over a period of time but under a variety of writing circumstances and attempting a variety of writing tasks. I realize that speculations about overall writing development from this study must be tentative due to my limited samplings. And yet until more longitudinal research is completed, composition teachers might consider the results of my research, which is yoked to the many such theories on teaching writing: that given a fertile instructional context and a flexible emphatic teacher, a self-designed purpose for writing, a collaborative peer audience, students of differing abilities will revise drafts of their papers on multiple levels of concern during a composition course.

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University of New Hampshire

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DEVELOPMENT OF REVISION STRATEGIES OF FRESHMEN

BASE LEVEL

TOPIC CONCERNS

Subject

1 Something easy to write on; humor, hobbies, sports.

2 A topic is found with relative ease.

3 An assignment is viewed as an official writing project.

Audience

1 The teacher is the audience.

MECHANICAL CONCERNS

Grammar

1 Thinks that knowledge of rules will improve quality of writing.

2 Student won't use a word he doesn't know how to spell.

Editing

1 Words are seen as indelible.

STRUCTURAL CONCERNS

Organization

1 Thinks in terms of space or how the words fit on the page.

PROCESS CONCERNS

Attitude

1 The process of writing is viewed as easy; self evaluation is non-critical.

Behaviors

No revision occurs; paper often passes through only one draft.

1 Writing is inspiration: Writing depends upon mood.

LEVEL 1

TOPIC CONCERNS

Subject

1 Finding a topic becomes more difficult.

2 Begins to write in a personal voice on more difficult topics.

3 Writing about personal experiences is cathartic.

Audience

1 Considers peers as part of the audience.

2 Begins to recognize that the teacher audience is an obstacle in writing.

MECHANICAL CONCERNS

Editing

1 The sentence is the unit for revision.

2 Obsession with rules begins to fade.

3 Concern for editing takes over.

STRUCTURAL CONCERNS

Organization

1 Attempts to expand paper; concept of detail is one of addition, rather than perception.

2 Experiments with ways of organizing the basic material.

3 A focus on beginnings and endings to hold the paper together.

PROCESS CONCERNS

Attitude

1 There is a reluctance to revise.

2 Self-evaluation is less positive, more tentative.

Behavior

Revision is editing. Rewriting is a mechanical process.

1 Paper usually passes through two drafts at this level. Sometimes student adds new material on a separate sheet.

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DEVELOPMENT OF REVISION STRATEGIES OF FRESHMEN

LEVEL 2

TOPIC CONCERNS

Subject

1 Growing dissatisfaction with focus or scope of topic, often the result of peer or teacher feedback.

2 Recognizes that writing about intimate topics may be difficult.

3 Understands the technical problems that a topic may create.

Audience

1 The self becomes part of the audience; senses that writing is revealing.

2 Confusion over how much to tell about a subject which is not familiar to the audience.

3 Has internalized an audience; knows when teacher evaluation strikes a true cord.

MECHANICAL CONCERNS

Editing

Editing gives way to re-drafting new material.

1 Deletes whole chunks of unnecessary material.

2 Additions are made to reveal rather than to expand.

3 Smooths over sections of a paper.

STRUCTURAL CONCERNS

Organization

Focus on the internal rather than the external structure of the paper.

1 Considers the proportions of the paper in an attempt to heighten what is really important.

2 Awareness that once a word or a phrase is changed, the entire paper must be re-considered.

3 Recognizes the difference between a detail which shows and one which merely tells. Organizes the paper around revealing material.

PROCESS CONCERNS

Attitude

Revision now means content.

1 Revising is an intellectual process, not a mechanical act.

2 The concept of revision is ahead of the ability to revise.

Behavior

1 Student develops an elaborate system for incorporating new material; rarely does the writer begin an entirely new draft.

2 Shift in revision from local concerns to global problems in the paper.

LEVEL 3

TOPIC CONCERNS

Subject

1 Works with personally disturbing material.

2 Experiments with topics which call for imagery; is not fearful of the poetic voice.

Audience

1 Turns away from peer and teacher evaluation to self evaluation.

2 Wants the paper to ring true to the self.

3 Publication may be a consideration at this stage.

MECHANICAL CONCERNS

Re-drafting

1 Searching for the right word, the telling detail, the revealing scene.

STRUCTURAL CONCERNS

Organization

1 Focus on themes in paper.

2 Understands the concept of unity in a paper.

3 Constructs a new focus for his paper.

PROCESS CONCERNS

Attitude

1 Revision means discovering a new intention for the paper.

2 Student understands that revision is a long process.

3 Distance is important to the writer.

Behavior

1 Student is willing to start a new draft, is no longer bound to his original draft.

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Helping Students Develop a Sense of Audience

Pat Slattery

Most composition teachers recognize — thanks largely to the research of James Britton — that many college students have written primarily for a single audience: their teachers. Despite the fact that most of us are concerned about this restriction that has undoubtedly retarded the development of our students' sense of audience, some of us may still lack a method that effectively familiarizes students with composing for a variety of audiences. Britton's research team noted, however, "that there are strengths within the school context which are available to be used and which might be genuine alternatives to a teacher audience in the provision of more open contexts for the exercise of informative writing in particular — and facilitating for all writing, perhaps, the transition from a known and immediate audience to a wider public" (128). Drawing from Britton's audience classifications, I am proposing a structured systematic approach that encourages students to write for an entire range of readers — from "self" to the "unknown audience."

Before describing the approach, however, I will briefly consider some of the current practices used to provide audiences for student writing. Most often, the audiences for school-sponsored writing consist of those readers readily accessible in the classroom — teachers and students. Even when only the teacher reads the compositions, however, students do not typically write for the "teacher" but for a "knowledgeable audience" consisting of specialists in a given field. In this case, there are really two audiences: the "evaluator," who is the actual reader, and the audience that he or she supposedly represents. To provide their students with an audience of peers, some writing instructors ask the entire class to read and respond to papers. Moreover, many introductory writing courses seem to have a mixture of these three types of audiences: teacher as "evaluator," teacher as representative of a "knowledgeable audience," and peers.

On the other hand, some instructors have attempted to break through the restriction of writing for classroom audiences, asking their students to imagine other readers. In *Casebook Rhetoric*, for instance, David Tedlock and Paul Jarvie fabricate complete rhetorical situations in which students play the role of a particular person and write with a specified purpose to a prescribed, imaginary audience. In my experience, however, students writing for an imaginary audience have tended to compose with the teacher in mind, because they know that the instructor is the only one who reads their work. At the conclusion of a course in which I used *Casebook Rhetoric*, my

students, for the final assignment, attempted to describe their own composing processes; one writer, referring to the tasks that involved using cases, remarked, "I am aware . . . that talking to the reader is talking to the teacher that is actually reading and grading the paper. I try to consciously be aware that I am actually writing the paper for the teacher." I suggest that both the approach that takes advantage of real readers available in the classroom and the approach that requires students to compose for imaginary audiences have limitations in their potential to develop sense of audience.

The central question, it seems, is how to vary the audiences for school-sponsored writing without requiring students to compose for imaginary readers. One answer, I believe, particularly lies in Britton's audience classifications of "self," virtual named audience," "teacher," "wider (known) audience," and "unknown audience," so that students can write for varied and yet authentic readers. This approach takes students through a structured set of tasks whose audiences, ranging from close intimates to total strangers, become increasingly less known or knowable. Even though students surely consider the "evaluator" to some extent, the role of this audience is minimized as much as possible. When I used this approach, students wrote on the general topic of "college life," so that the assignments would share a thematic connection as well.

First, each student considers the most intimate reader, his or her "self." Since writing for the "self" does not encourage a student to consider any external rearler, this might initially seem to be a step away from developing a sense of audience; the "self," however, is a logical point to begin the sequence of assignments. Because writing to oneself does not require the cognitive act of considering the "other," it is less intimidating and less complex than composing for an external audience, and, as Linda Flower suggests, students can later transform writing for the "self" into writing for less internalized audiences. By writing for the "self" in journals that they keep for the entire semester, students, without worrying about the reader, can generate ideas and possibly "rough" drafts. But, of course, somewhere in the process of writing, students must remember that they are ultimately composing for an external reader. When teaching with this approach, I used the thematic direction of the journal when I assigned particular tasks; by exploring in their journal "new experiences during the first week of school," for instance, students write entries that they can draw from when addressing the next, slightly less knowable reader, the "virtual named audience."

Letters provide students with the opportunity to write to a "virtual named audience," the type of reader for the next two tasks. For the second assignment, each student writes to a friend from home.

Because they know that they will actually mail their letters, students tend to write with the chosen friend in mind more easily. One of my students intimately greeted his pal with "What'sss up Coolness?" and also confided, although not without a hint of pride, that "I might as well major in social life cause . . . it's kicking a hole in my ass." Most college freshmen, I think, are accustomed to communicating with their intimate acquaintances; consequently, for this assignment, the primary role of the instructor becomes not to teach students how to address such an audience, but to make them consciously aware of the decisions that they are making naturally.

The third writing task, a letter to a senior administrator, continues the sequence of gradually less internalized readers. In anticipation of this assignment, a teacher might focus journal entries to "dissatisfying aspects of college living." Because these letters to the administrator are also mailed, students again seem to take into consideration the intended audience. One of my students, in a letter to the vice-president of our school, wrote of "expanding the Black Culture Center." After arguing that the present facility is inadequate, she anticipated the vice-president's counter-argument:

> I know the expansion would be costly, but it would be worthwhile. After all, groups such as the Soul Review and the Afro-American Choral Ensemble function to represent the university as a whole. More space will improve the quality of these students' programs. By expanding, more students who otherwise could not afford tutors will also be able to seek help. Better music programs and more tutorial sessions will attract more students, and more students means more money for the university. Most of all, by expanding the Black Culture Center, you will be showing . . . that you believe in equal rights . . .

Soon after this letter (as well as twenty-nine others) was mailed, a phone call to my apartment suddenly reminded *me* of the authenticity of the audience — the vice-president, I learned, was going to send to our class a representative to respond to the letters.

Admittedly the enthusiasm that this visit generated subsided somewhat when students moved to the fourth audience category, that of "teacher." Britton, as we know, pointed out that 95 percent of the scripts he analyzed were written for the teacher, but the predominance of this type of writing necessitates, rather than negates, I think, the need to practice it. Recognizing that success in academic writing can accelerate learning, self-confidence, and social escalation, Mina Shaughnessy has referred to mastering this form of writing as "a kind of acculturation as well as a strategy for survival" (194). As mentioned, I have found that students are often re-

quired to write for the teacher as a representative of a "knowlegeable audience"; in this case, which presents a complex problem of audience analysis, students need to know how to assess the ways an instructor might define this group of educated specialists of which he or she is a representative. Writing for the "teacher" pervades our students' academic work, and therefore I think we are obliged to include this audience in the sequence of assignments.

The next task, however, involves writing a short chapter of a handbook for incoming freshmen — a "wider (known) audience." From journal entries written on "what freshmen need to know," students choose some aspect of their community or school to explain to new students. To encourage writers to grapple with the complexity of the wider audience of all freshmen rather than composing with the teacher in mind, I copied the chapters, and the class and I compiled the handbook, distributing a copy to each of the authors as well as my following year's freshmen. The handbook chapters tended to fall within two of the subcategories that Britton associates with the "wider (known) audience" — "expert to known laymen" and "adolescent to peer group" — but almost none of the papers seemed to address the teacher. Chapter titles ranged from "Financial Aid," to "Pinball Arcades," to "Returning Women Students." In another chapter, "Drinking Guide for Freshmen," an experienced student explained how people under twenty-one can purchase alcohol, suggesting the use of a fake ID, but also warning that the particular store in our area which does the most business has "too much at stake to let some kid slide by with a Lone Ranger Membership Card that says he's 35." Try one of the smaller stores, she wisely insisted — "Hopefully the cashier will fall for it and ignore the fact that you want 15 cases of beer."

Completing the development away from the "self," students write for an "unknown audience," supplying a context broad enough to include readers whose experiences, interests, and sophistication they can only estimate. They can consider this type of audience when writing letters to the editor of a newspaper or rebuttals for a radio or television program. More specifically, each of my students entered one of the several public debates on education; their topics included federal grant decreases, financial aid cut-off at our university during the summer, and prayer in public high schools. Students, of course, mailed these letters to the appropriate media centers, and — at last count — three letters had been published.

Students seem to consider their audience easily when writing to close friends, but as the readers for the remaining assignments become increasingly less known or knowable, students need more

help. To aid themselves in understanding and remembering their audience when writing, they can try strategies such as role playing the reader, acting out a dialogue between the reader and the writer with a friend, and simply visualizing the audience. Using these strategies makes it easier for students (and teachers) to respond to writing in terms of the audience's sophistication, knowledge and interest. Structure and transition, for example, become relevant when considering a reader's comprehension, and focus depends on a reader's interest and knowledge. As long as writers know that the intended audience will read their compositions, peer analysis, in forms such as role playing, seems to accentuate rather than sacrifice the authenticity of the intended reader.

Drawing from the research of James Britton, I have proposed an approach that allows students to compose for a range of authentic readers. This approach, I suggest, gives students a better chance to develop a mature sense of audience and also to discover something that we as teachers might tend to forget at times — that writing, even in a school context, can serve many purposes other than fulfilling an assignment for a teacher.

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In Defense of the Teacher-As-Audience

Thomas Newkirk

Let's begin with the dilemma.

As teachers of writing we must believe two seemingly incompatible propositions:

1. Texts do not lend themselves to one normative or proper reading. Reading is a transaction between the text and the person reading the text, and because we all bring something different to the text, we take away something different.
2. As teachers we evaluate writing; we, not the students, make the judgement that is recorded. In many cases we implicitly override the judgement of the student who was satisfied enough to turn the paper in. Ours is the reading that counts.

In other words, all readings are equal, but some are more equal than others.

Anyone who has ever used peer conferences has felt the tension between these propositions. Writing that is successful with peers may disappoint us. We wince as major "problems" in organization, major omissions in information go unnoticed. But if they don't see a problem, can we say there is one? Must our dissatisfaction be their dissatisfaction? Do we impose our reading or hold back?

Twenty years ago this probably would not have been a problem. Students wrote for the teacher who not only graded but corrected the writing. But in the late 60s and early 70s the "teacher-as-audience" began to be challenged. James Moffet wrote in 1968:

> It is much easier for peers than for the teacher to be candid and give an authentic response, because the teacher, usually aware of his special significance, is afraid of wounding his students. A student responds and comments to a peer more in his own terms, whereas the teacher is likely to focus too soon on technique. A student, moreover, may write off the comments of the teacher by saying to himself, "Adults just can't understand," or "English teachers are nitpickers anyway," but when his fellow human beings misread him, he has to accommodate the feedback (194).

The only role Moffett is willing to allow the teacher is that of clarifying the reactions of students, for example, helping to pinpoint the cause of a particular reaction.

This emphasis on the peer audience, also found in the influential work of Kenneth Macrorie and Peter Elbow, has its appeal. In the

peer group students did have an audience of more than one; they could get a diversity of feedback; they could write for readers who did not grade their work. All in all, the peer group seemed to offer something the traditional classroom did not — an audience responding in the way normal audiences respond.

But there are problems with Moffett's argument. For one, he (and most critics of the teacher-as-audience) uses a "worst case" strategy. Many teachers have been poor audiences — we all have our horror stories to tell. I have one from a student who had his finger broken when a teacher hit him for poor margins. But because something is often done poorly does not mean it cannot be done well. The existence of poor auto mechanics does not demonstrate the futility of engine repair.

The more serious problem, though, is the closed system that Moffet seems to create. If the teacher's role is to do no more than clarify student responses, how do higher expectations enter in? Most students are not aware of the outer limits of the genres they write in; they are unfamiliar with the strategies they might use to approach these limits. By contrast, the experienced teacher has seen many students at various points of development and has seen these students progress. He or she knows (or can learn?) how to "raise the ante," how to pose the question or make the suggestion that will help the student progress.

And because student responses are "authentic" does not mean they are automatically useful. I remember visiting a first-grade classroom where six-year-old Amy had finished reading a three-sentence description of her birthday party to the teacher and three other children. The teacher suggested that readers might want to know more about the party. A first-grader in the group responded that if they did, they might ask Amy to invite them to her next party.

This response makes perfect sense. The other children *would* learn more by going to the party than by reading a more detailed account — it would also be more fun. But questions like those the teacher asked will push the children sooner or later to begin to expect explicitness in a text. Details will need to be in the text and not available at the next party. The teacher is gently pushing students toward a way of reading that is closer to that of mature readers.

The teacher, I am suggesting, stands as a representative of the interpretive community that the student gradually enters. The child's response, while plausible, is inconsistent with the norms of the interpretive community represented by the teacher. Because in this community writing is used to transcend time and space and must therefore be reasonably explicit.

I borrow the term "interpretive community" from Stanley Fish. Members of interpretive communities share common strategies and norms for reading and interpreting texts. This does not mean that they always agree. Scholars can disagree on their interpretations of *Hamlet*'s character, but they recognize the validity of different interpretations if certain (often unspoken) rules of interpreting are followed. Some interpretations are "out of bounds," not worth discussing because they are based on a different set of norms. The literary scholar would spend no time arguing with someone who did not like *Hamlet* because it had too many long words — although this complaint would have validity among a group of struggling ninth graders.

By viewing the instructor and students as members of distinct interpretive communities, we can begin to deal with the dilemma I opened with. Student readings do make sense; they are plausible; they are based upon discernible beliefs about what makes a text satisfying. But these beliefs, these ways of reading, are often different from those of the interpretive community represented by the teacher. The job of the teacher is to help students understand, accept, and adopt these beliefs.

Let's take the issue of *elaboration*. We frequently say that good writing is detailed, full of information. But the value of this elaboration is often not apparent to the beginning writer who may view a request for more information as a call to "pad," to "go on and on." Often beginning writers feel they will insult or bore their reader if they add too much detail. Teachers on the other hand rarely find beginning writers who bore the reader with details. The problem is the other way around, lack of detail, threadbareness.

I once took this lack of detail to be a sign of egocentrism in Piaget's sense of the word. Students left out detail because they were only seeing the subject from their own point of view, and consequently they left out details that they knew but that their readers did not. Now I believe that *I* was the egocentric one. For I found that papers, which to me seemed threadbare, were often quite interesting to the writer's peers. Clearly we were looking for different things when we read.

In fact, we were finding different ways of satisfying our need for information. We were elaborating in different ways. I was expecting much of the elaboration to be done by the writer where students were doing much of the elaboration as readers. Both ways of reading are plausible, but they result in radically different evaluations.

We all do some elaborating as readers. No text is fully explicit. If I write — "I went to the movies" — you will *read in* many things. You will assume that I paid money to get in; that I probably drove my car

to get to the theatre; that as I entered I passed a candy stand — and much more. I automatically rely on you, my reader, to supply some of this information from our common knowledge of movie going. I will do some elaborating, but I rely on you to do some too. It's getting the right *ratio* that counts, hitting the right balance between stated and unstated, between explicit and implicit.

One of the things we teach writing students is to adjust the ratio of elaboration — to write to an audience who demands greater explicitness, who cannot (or will not) take on the major work of filling in the information. The issue is most prominent in papers close to the students' own lives. A college freshman will *identify* with the paper written by a peer on adjusting to college life. The paper sets off a chain of memories in the reader, and the pleasure of reading is, to a large extent, the pleasure or poignancy of these memories. The inexplicitness of the text often leaves dreaming room, remembering room. Students may justify the inexplicitness by saying that the paper leaves something to the reader's imagination. Take the following paper written by an eighth-grader:

> Sam Hill My Closest Friend
>
> When I just moved back from Kansas I missed my friend so this was a relly big switch for me until I met Sam at a friend's house we both had something in common we both liked roller scating basketball and swimming The fair was just a week away so I asked him to go he said yes. The week whiped by. Saturday night was finaly here we left my house at 5:00 we entered the gate and went straight for the round up we went on the scrambler after that after that we played soem game about three hours later we went in the fun house and I lost him in the last part of it. When I got out he was standing there smiling we went on the tempest faris wheel and slide three times before we left. Three weeks later he moved to Vermont we promised to write often but we'll both miss seeing each other but it will happen to him over and over again. He'll loose friends he'll gain friends really friends can be good friends and close friends or just friends or just friends but close friends are the best kind there your friend for life. They shareproblems help solve problems. And they care about you and you care about them and that makes a very, very close friend.

It is possible to read this as a very successful paper — it touches experiences we have all had, going to a county fair, having a friend, saying goodbye to a friend. Let your mind go back to these experiences. Savor them. I remember the time my best friend was set to

move to Michigan, that empty helpless feeling I had watching them pack, then the miraculous reprieve when the job fell through.

We take this stance all the time — I listen to songs that way. The ones I like best send me back to my own store of memories, and I am glad to have this way back. But as writing teachers, as representatives of our interpretive community, we would probably resist this stance. We would want greater explicitness. We would ask, "What made Sam such a close friend?" "What could you do with him that you couldn't do with other kids your age?" "Could you give an example of 'him caring for you and you caring for him'?" We would expect the writer to do the elaborating for us.

I am not suggesting that students should not share their writing in small groups. They need practice clarifying their own standards of judgement, and they need an opportunity to try out the standards of the interpretive community they are about to enter. They also need the experience of sorting through a variety of responses and finding the ones that are useful.

But the teacher is more than a helpful bystander in this process. The role of the teacher is to demonstrate the standards of this new community. I say "demonstrate" because I don't think that checklists, specific questions, feedback sheets — useful as they are — are enough. Students need to see criteria *in* action; they need to see how these criteria are applied in specific cases. It is one thing to say that organization is important — it is another to show students how an opening paragraph points the reader in several conflicting directions.

I have no magic formula for offering successful demonstrations, but here are four suggestions:

Use I Comments. Too often we fall back on an omniscient tone when we respond to writing — "this paper lacks focus." It's as if we're saying, "I took your paper and showed it to God. God read your paper, and this is what he said..." Comments like this one are usually uninformative and frequently intimidating to the student. What's worse, they imply that "focus" is something that is either *in* or *not in* the paper, when in fact focus is part of a transaction between paper and reader. It is not a part of the text in the way that a carburator is part of an engine.

The reader using I comments reveals himself or herself as a *reader* not a representative of the Almighty. The teacher in this role tries to give the student not so much a judgement as a clear description of what happened during the reading. A teacher responding to "Sam Hill" might say, "When I was reading your paper I knew you were close to him, but at the end I wanted to know more about ways you helped each other out. Could you tell me something about that?"

Show Students Papers Just Beyond Their Level of Performance. It's a good idea to save some of the better papers from previous courses to show students early in a writing class. It is far more useful for a student to see a paper using detail well than to be *told* how important detail is. Once papers begin coming in, it is important for the class to see some of the better ones for the same reason. Student papers are often more effective models than professionally written pieces because they seem within the range of possible performance, within what Lev Vygotsky calls a "zone of proximal development."

Write. It is now a cliche that teachers of writing should write. But cliches become cliches because they are true. One of the advantages of writing is that we sharpen our own critical judgements by grappling with language at close quarters. There is nothing like having to forge a transition to help a writer/reader become aware of what makes a good transition. Paradoxically, extensive reading of finished products may not have taught us this critical reading skill. We can read quite happily without noticing the technical aspects of the text which work to create our enjoyment. A teacher who writes learns to read like a writer, to penetrate the composing decisions of the writer.

Share Writing. Another cliche. Writers need response. If teachers can meet in response groups, they can see the kind of feedback that helps them. My participation in writing groups has helped me understand how impatient I can get with exclusively positive comments (though I do need some of them). But I soon feel like I'm on my twelfth Hershey Kiss, and I want something a bit more substantial. I then look for the reader who will ask the question that pushes me to reconsider what I've written, who pushes me to realize that it could be better. They help re-open my text. They help me realize a fact that I always find hard to acknowledge when I finish a draft — that it isn't done. These are the readers I value most because they work to keep me honest.

Each writer needs a different profile of response. Some need almost no praise; some seem to need nothing but praise. Some understand what needs to be done with a paper and merely need a chance to talk. Others may have totally lost perspective on what they have done and are ready to throw the paper out the window (and to follow it out). Participating in a writing group allows the teacher to see the range of useful responses and to become more skillful at offering response.

So who do students write for? The answer, I feel, has to be *us*. We can no more shake this responsibility than we can run from our shadow. We can, to be sure, misuse this authority — by being unclear

concerning our standards, by using this authority to intimidate students, by focusing our instruction on purely idiosyncratic concerns, by asking students to adopt rigid forms like the five-paragraph theme that have no real existence in our interpretive community, by not being a reader, by not being a writer.

We can, however, use this authority without being authoritarian. Janet Emig would begin her writing classes in the Vermont Writing Program by writing at her desk before the students came in. As the students walked in she continued writing. Students would look up at the blackboard where she had written, "I am writing, please join me."

We are asking students to join us. To learn skills and ways of writing that this community values. Learn them and you will be taken seriously. We will try to show you how these rules do not restrict you to a single kind of writing, that we expect your writing to retain personality and voice. But some day you may use the skills we have taught you to challenge us, to argue for a different kind of community, to point out shortcomings and argue for something better.

We wish you the best.

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Information for Authors

The Leaflet is published three times a year by the New England Association of Teachers of English. *The Leaflet* prints articles on all facets and levels of English/Language Arts instruction. Now in its 84th year, *The Leaflet* is the oldest of the journals dedicated to the teaching of English.

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